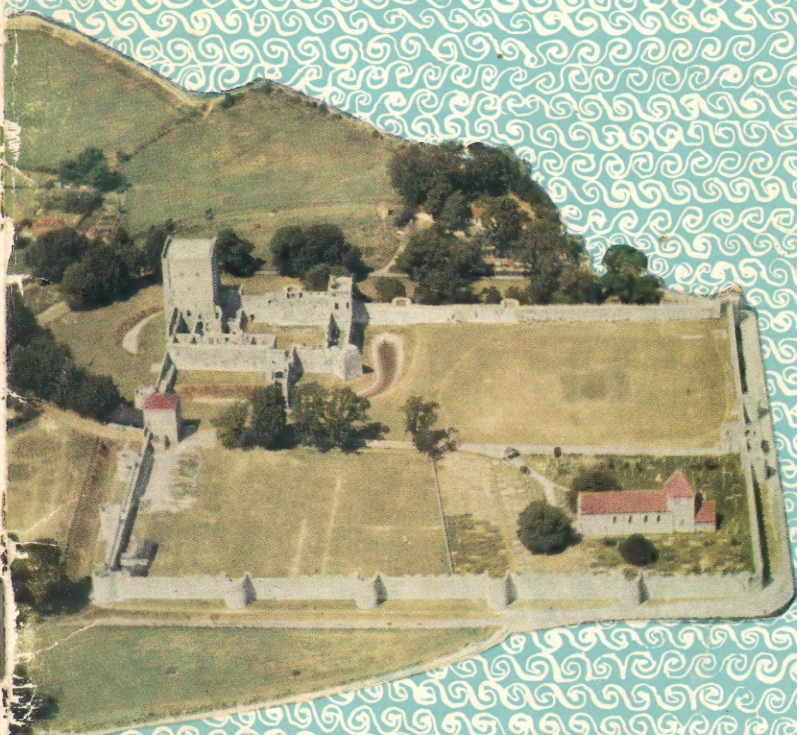


The
ROMAN FORTS
of the
SAXON SHORE



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Cover: Portchester Castle from an aircraft over the English Channel

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The
ROMAN FORTS
of the
SAXON SHORE

by

LEONARD COTTRELL

London

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

1964: Reprinted 1971

Opposite: South-east bastion of Burgh Castle

Note

It should be understood that, where opinions are expressed, they are those of the author, and are not necessarily shared by the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments in the Department or by excavators who have worked on behalf of the Department.



1. What was the “Saxon Shore”?

Girdling the coast of south-eastern Britain, from Brancaster in Norfolk to Portchester in Hampshire, is a chain of mighty Roman forts. There were originally at least ten, possibly eleven, of which nine survive in varying states of preservation. They are generally known by the somewhat romantic name ‘Forts of the Saxon Shore’ (*Litus Saxonicum*) and were commanded by an officer who bore the resounding title *Comes litoris Saxonici per Britanniam*—‘Count of the Saxon Shore of Britain’.

Most were built towards the end of the third century AD, though some, *e.g.* Richborough, incorporate portions of earlier buildings, and others, *e.g.* Pevensey and Portchester, were adapted by the Norman and Plantagenet Kings and nobles and grew into medieval castles, while Reculver was built early in the third century and adapted for Saxon Shore Fort purposes. These four particular forts are now administered by the

Saxon Shore Forts in Britain and Gaul



Department of the Environment, and will be described in detail later. Meanwhile let us look at the 'Saxon Shore' system as a whole.

Here is a list giving their original Latin names and modern equivalents:

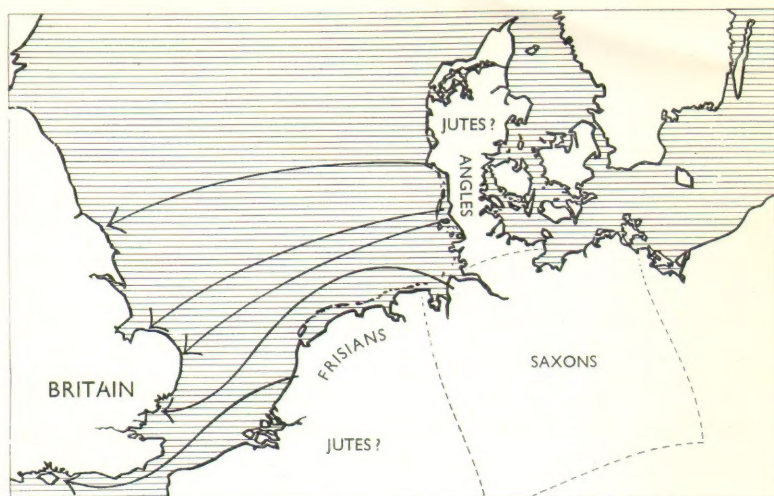
<i>Branodunum</i>	Brancaster
<i>Gariannonum</i>	Burgh Castle
<i>Othona</i>	Bradwell
<i>Regulbium</i>	Reculver
<i>Rutupiae</i>	Richborough
<i>Dubris</i>	Dover
<i>Lemanis</i>	Lympne
<i>Anderida</i>	Pevensy
<i>Portus Adurni</i>	Portchester

These are the nine forts listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, an official handbook of the civil and military organization of the Roman Empire which probably dates from between the fourth and fifth centuries AD. The identification of most of these forts is certain, but two are conjectural. Although nine forts are listed in the *Notitia*, we know from recent records that there was another Saxon-Shore-type fort at Walton Castle near Felixstowe; this might possibly have been *Portus Adurni* or *Othona*; it has since been swallowed up by the sea, so we may never know.

There are many Roman forts in Britain, especially in the North. Why then should these south-eastern strongholds excite attention? Because, although they vary somewhat in shape and size, they all have certain common characteristics. They are all on or near the sea, usually at strategic points – harbours or river-mouths – guarding the natural gateways which any seaborne invader of south-eastern Britain might attempt to force. Each could hold a substantial garrison, but it also adjoined a harbour from which a Roman fleet could operate. Few of the forts are on or near important Roman roads; communication between them must have been by sea.

Again, their general structure is broadly similar: high, heavy stone walls with projecting bastions for mounting *ballistae* – the Roman artillery; flanking ditches for additional defence; accommodation for a strong garrison with a naval arm. And they were all built – or in some cases rebuilt – at about the same period, the latter part of the third century AD. Why?

The general assumption for many years has been that they were erected



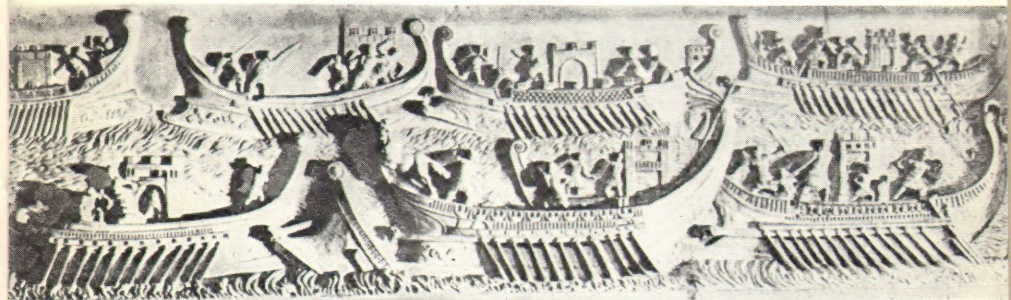
Probable sea routes of assailants on Britain. (Opposite) Heavy Roman galleys fitted with fighting turrets

to act as protection against the Saxon sea-raiders who, at this period, were beginning to harry the coasts of Britain, northern France and the Low Countries. There is in fact a parallel defensive system, a Gaulish *Litus Saxonicum*, on the other side of the Channel, from Mardyck, near Calais, southward as far as Blaye on the estuary of the Garonne (or alternatively Blavet in Brittany). It is exactly contemporaneous with the British 'Saxon Shore' defences and the names of the forts are also given in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Again each of these forts, such as those near Rouen, Coutances, Avranches, Vannes, Nantes, etc., was, like the British counterparts, on or near the sea-coast.

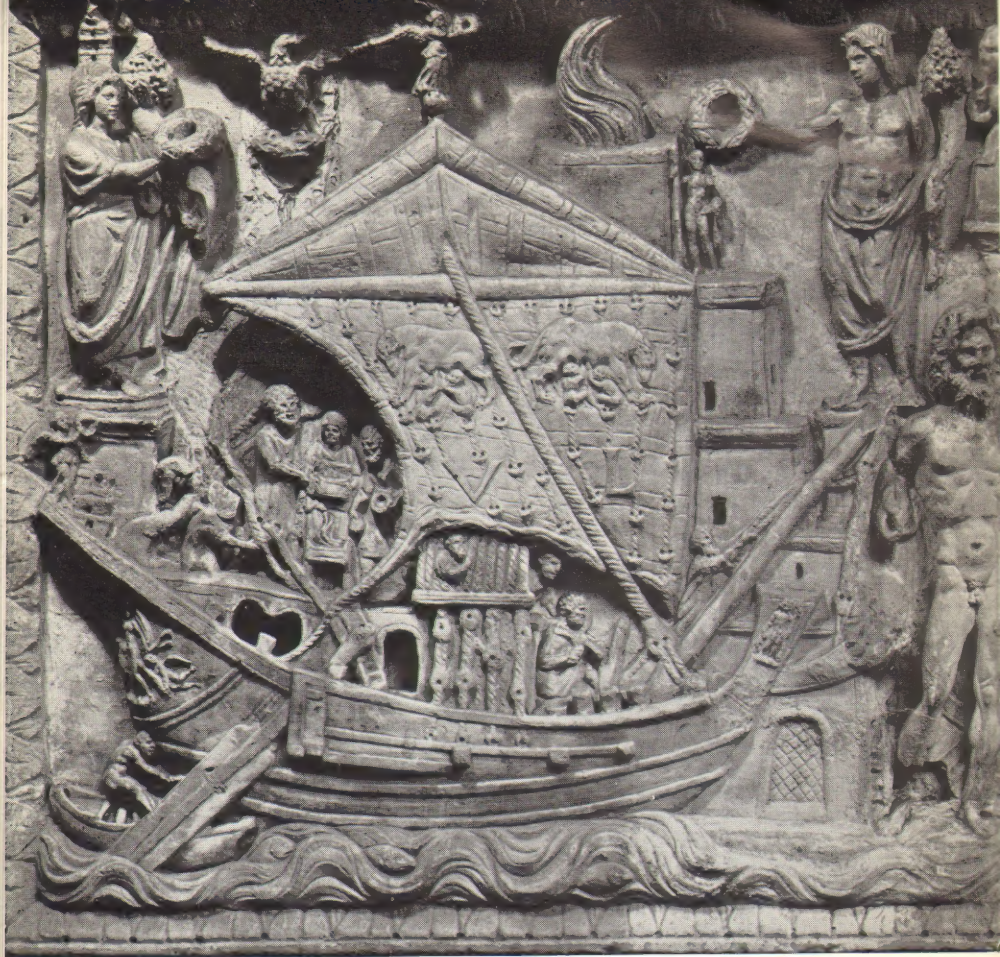
But there the parallel ends. The Gallic *Litus Saxonicum* does not appear to have been a closely-knit defensive system, and whilst most of the forts were on or near the coast, five of them were *not* on navigable rivers or estuaries. Moreover each of these five stations guarded places well worth defending *in themselves*; they were not therefore necessarily part of a general defensive system designed to prevent seaborne invaders penetrating into the hinterland. In Britain the opposite is true, and this fact may be important, as we shall see later.

2. The nine forts in order

Taking them in order from the north, there is first *Branodunum* (Bran-caster) on the coast between Burnham Market and Hunstanton, in Norfolk. Nothing interesting remains above ground, but excavations have revealed the foundations of an almost square building enclosing $6\frac{1}{2}$ acres; nine-foot-thick walls were strengthened at the corners by bastions; there were centrally located gateways, as at other 'Saxon Shore' forts; and coins found on the site, together with pottery, suggest a date not earlier than the latter part of the third century. Thirteen coins have been found with the emblem of Carausius, the distinguished Menapian (Belgic) mariner who, in AD 284, was given a Channel command against Saxon pirates; later he rebelled against the Emperor Maximian, proclaimed himself Emperor and held Britain and part of Gaul for a time. Carausius, whom we shall meet again later, plays an absorbing part in this story.



Much better preserved is the next fort to the south, Burgh Castle, identified as Roman *Gariannonum*. It now overlooks the river Waveney and is well back from the sea, but in Roman times it may have occupied a peninsula commanding a tidal estuary. Three sides of the massive fort-walls remain, about eleven feet wide at the base and six at the top, and still about fifteen high in places. As at *Branodunum* the area enclosed is not large – about five acres – but the great pear-shaped bastions survive, one of them still equipped with a socket for a *ballista*. Here, in summer, among the fields of waving wheat, you may imagine the Stablesian Cavalry, who came from Dalmatia (modern Yugoslavia), riding out to exercise their mounts. An inscription records that they were stationed here for a time.



Relief in Greek marble found 100 years ago near the Torlonia villa beside the Emperor Trajan's harbour near Rome. Behind the vessel is a lighthouse with statue and beacon

Still further south, in Essex, lies Bradwell, now incongruously backed by the newly-built nuclear power station. Bradwell, which may have been Roman *Othona*, is also on an estuary, in this case the Blackwater. Over 500 feet of the west wall survive, and fragments of the north and south sides, with a ponderous horse-shoe-shaped bastion. Coins dating from the time of Gallienus (260-268) to Honorius (395-423) have been found on the site, with those of Carausius predominating.

Moving now into Kent we find Reculver (*Regulbium*) on the silted-up

Wantsum river, though when the fort was built the channel must have been a broad waterway lying between the coast and the island of Thanet. Today there is little to see of the fort; the sea has eaten nearly half of it away. But earlier generations of archaeologists examined it and made



Bows of a Roman warship of about 30 BC

measurements. From these we know *Regulbium* had walls eight feet thick surrounding a square enclosure, and protected by a ditch and an earth rampart. Date: probably early third century, from pottery in the rampart later confirmed by an inscription.

East of Reculver, on the other side of the horn-like eastern tip of Kent Richborough (*Rutupiae*) stands, its huge grey weather-worn ramparts looming over the Kentish flats, like the derelict hulk of some great ship left behind by the sea. And indeed the sea did once wash under the walls

of *Rutupiae* some seventeen hundred summers ago; and even earlier, in the first century, when Juvenal commanded its oysters. Perhaps the most impressive of all 'Saxon Shore' forts, it is now under the care of the Department of the Environment and will be described later in this booklet.

Continuing our survey we come next to Dover (*Dubris*) where the fort lies buried under the modern town. Not much evidence has come to light, but there is little doubt that *Dubris* was the seat of an officer of the Saxon

*Coin of Antoninus Pius
(Emperor 138-161), showing
Claudian lighthouse
with beacon*

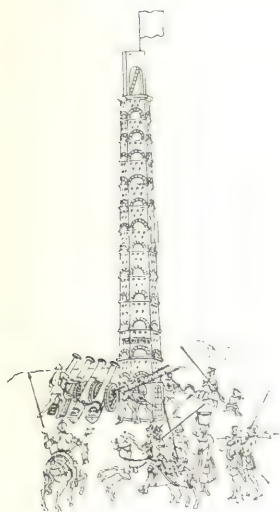
(On opposite page) *Sketch
of the Roman lighthouse at
Boulogne made during the
siege of 1544; and on right,
the Pharos at Dover, per-
haps the oldest building in
England, which must have
been similar*



Shore force; fragments of a wall revealed in small-scale excavations may have been part of the fort. There is, of course, one splendid Roman monument in Dover, the famous *Pharos* or lighthouse which stands within the courtyard of the medieval castle, and still looks out over the Channel across which the Roman ships moved to and from the mainland of France. There was another Roman lighthouse on the western hill corresponding to the surviving *Pharos* on the eastern knoll.

Lympne (*Portus Lemanis*), though fragmentary, has something of the brooding strangeness of Richborough; possibly because of its site: a few forlorn walls tilted at odd angles, lost in the stretching wastes of Romney Marsh. This is a part of England in which little has changed;

the most recent innovation, probably, is the Military Canal, built at the time of Napoleon. The best place from which to see *Portus Lemani* is not from close at hand, but from the scarp above it, near the manor house of Lymgne Place. At first one's eye wanders across the featureless green level towards the now distant sea; then suddenly focuses on the tumbled grey rubble walls of the fort. Imagination is needed to see it as it was; when the sea came right up to it, when galleys were moored beneath its walls, and a unit of Tungrians from Belgic Gaul was stationed within



them. But the forts have capacity to stir the imagination, not least because of a certain mystery surrounding them.

Two more strongholds complete the chain, Pevensey (*Anderida*) and Portchester (*Portus Adurni*). The first is in Sussex, on what was, in Roman times, a peninsula rising above the marshes near the mouth of the river Ashburn. The second is in Hampshire, overlooking Portsmouth Harbour, and, unlike the other forts, is still on the sea-coast. Both are now controlled by the Department of the Environment and will be described, with Richborough, later in this booklet. Meanwhile, let us examine what can be discovered, from literary, archaeological and other sources, about the *Litus Saxonicum* and the men who built and manned it.

3. What was the purpose of the forts?

For many years historians have held one of two main theories concerning the origin and purpose of the *Litus Saxonicum*. The first, now generally discarded, is that the name 'Saxon Shore' indicates an area of coastline upon which Saxon invaders had already established themselves, and that the forts were built to keep them in control. The second, still widely accepted by most scholars, is that these powerful military and naval installations were designed to keep watch against Saxon marauders and drive them away if they landed.

The picture thus evoked is dramatically satisfying: the Saxons in their raiding ships creeping up the Channel, slipping into the estuaries, probably under cover of night; then leaping ashore, plundering the Romano-British settlements and hurrying back to their beached ships laden with booty. Then the blast of trumpets, marching feet, shouted orders in Latin, and a Roman detachment from *Anderida* or *Rutupiae* is upon them. Or perhaps, the raiders are intercepted at sea; grappling-irons crash down on Saxon hulls and Roman spears rain down on the bossed shields and horned helmets of the raiders. Later the Saxon prisoners are marched back to the high-walled forts and interrogated.

Dramatically satisfying, yes; but is it true? In the fourth century, it probably was, because at that time we know that Saxon raiders were becoming a serious menace. But was it true in the third century, when, as we have seen, most of the forts were built? And if not true, then for what purpose *were* they built? Quite recently (1961) an American scholar, Donald A. White, of the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, has advanced an interesting new theory, backed by voluminous research. To understand this, it is necessary to consider the sources of our information concerning the *Litus Saxonicum*, and particularly the shadowy, dimly-seen character of a notable Belgic mariner named Carausius.

We know about Carausius mainly from two fourth-century Roman historians, Aurelius Victor and Eutropius, writing within a century of the events they describe. Other scanty information is contained in four of the Latin 'Panegyrics' – a collection of complimentary speeches in honour of the Emperor Maximian, Constantius and others. They don't tell us very much, but sufficient to make clear that Carausius was a



Coin of Carausius, commander of the British fleet

Menapian (a member of a Belgic tribe settled in the Low Countries, possibly in what is now Holland – or he may have come from the Lower Rhine), that he was of humble origin, a seaman who eventually rose to high rank in the Roman fleet operating in the Channel against Saxon pirates. This was in AD 284 when Diocletian (AD 284–305) ruled the Empire. According to Eutropius, the task entrusted to Carausius was to ‘pacify’ the sea-lanes stretching from his main base at Boulogne along the coasts of France and the Low Countries, which were infested by ‘Franks and Saxons’. The historians then go on to say that he misused his authority; that he allowed the raiders to plunder the coast, then intercepted them at sea and took their booty for himself.

This was at a time when the Roman Empire had stretched itself beyond its available strength. In 286 Diocletian, forced to delegate authority,

chose as his co-regent one Maximian, a capable soldier, who then ruled with him jointly. And in that year Carausius revolted against Maximian.

Why, we cannot be sure; all we are told is that this Belgic mariner, having been recalled by Maximian because of his alleged offences, rebelled against Rome; his fleet followed him into revolt and he then set up as Emperor himself. On taking the purple he assumed the names Marcus Aurelius Mauseaeus Carausius, of which only the last is likely to have been his own. Maximian sent out a naval force from Gaul against Carausius, but according to the Roman historians this was hindered by '*inclementia maris*' (a bad sea). It must be borne in mind that these writers – especially the Panegyricists – were writing 'official history' in which the victories of the Emperor would be glorified and his defeats minimised; it is more than likely that Carausius, whose naval *expertise* was admitted even by these prejudiced historians, defeated the forces sent to subdue him. Or, as happened to the Spanish Armada, there may have been a combination of unfavourable weather and superior naval skill.

Whatever the reason we know that for a time Diocletian and Maximian were forced to recognize Carausius, who had numerous coins struck bear-



*Coin of Nero
(Emperor 54-68),
showing mer-
chantmen with
sails and war gal-
leys with oars*

ing his name and titles. He controlled Britain and its three resident Legions; he controlled Boulogne, which was his headquarters; and he minted coins (including gold pieces) at two mints in Britain and may have had another mint at Rouen. Although his main strength lay in his fleet he could hardly have carried the revolt so far without the support of at least some of the provincials living along the strip of Channel coast which he controlled. Certainly he lacked neither the money nor resources, and was able to rule his 'British Empire' unhindered for seven years.

But he must have known, throughout this time, that eventually Maximian would try to reconquer Britain for Rome, and it was for this reason, according to Mr White's theory, that the third-century 'Saxon Shore' forts were built; not to repel the Saxons, who at this time were in insufficient strength to warrant such massive defences, but against the imminent possibility of a full-scale invasion of Britain by Roman military and naval forces.

If this theory is correct it would explain why the Gallic 'Saxon Shore', which Carausius also controlled, was not in any way so well planned and tightly integrated; because Carausius did not hope or wish to defend it.

*Coin of Allectus,
who lost Britain
to the Roman
Empire*





Constantius Chlorus is greeted by the City of London as he completes the recovery of Britain in 296

*(Opposite)
Sketch of
Pevensey Castle
attributed to
Thomas Girtin*

He pinned his hopes, like Churchill, on the 'embattled island' in which every strategic estuary from the Wash to the Isle of Wight was controlled by his powerful forts. Again, against the belief that the *Litus Saxonicum* was planned as a defence against Saxon raiders, it has been pointed out that few of the forts actually overlooked the sea.

In 293 the Emperor Constantius Chlorus, co-regent of Maximian, swiftly and skilfully invested Boulogne and took it. Shortly afterwards Carausius was murdered by his Chief of Finance, Allectus, who usurped his office. Three years later Constantius gathered his invading forces at two points on the French coast, Rouen and Boulogne, while Maximian's troops guarded the lower Rhine. In heavy fog the fleet of the praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus stole across the Channel and landed somewhere on the Hampshire coast, thus outflanking the defensive system. Then his forces marched inland and defeated Allectus. Once again Britain came under Roman rule, which was to last for only another century and a quarter.

Most probably it was during this period that the forts built by Carausius were used against serious and determined penetration by the Saxons who came, this time, not as mere raiders but as invaders and settlers. It was then, probably, that the chain of forts was supplemented by a chain of signal stations which could send out warnings, flame by night and smoke by day.

But by the beginning of the fifth century the Roman Empire, threatened at its very heart, could no longer spare soldiers to defend this remote northern island, and the famous Legions which had defended Britain for some four hundred years sailed from the Channel ports, never to return.

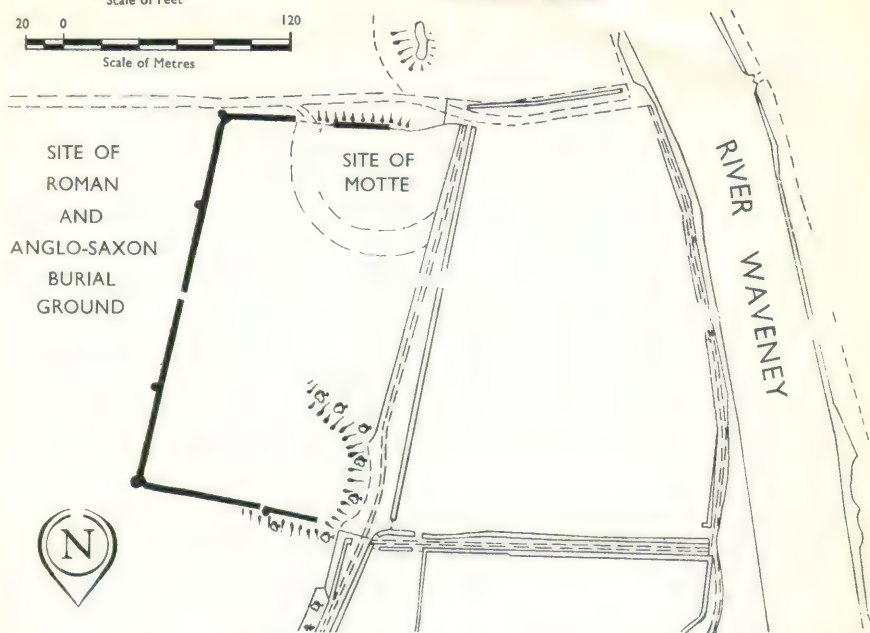


Roman Fort and Walls, looking S.W. from the River, on Porchester Castle

Most of the 'Saxon Shore' forts slowly rotted away; first to go would be the timber and fittings; then the roofs; until at last only the massive walls of stone, rubble and iron-hard cement remained to defy nearly 2000 years of British weather. A few were taken over by the Norman conquerors and became castles, and thus a different life began within the walls which had heard the barked commands of the centurions, the shrilling of trumpets and the tramp of Roman sentries.



BURGH



(Opposite) *Study of Burgh Castle* by J. B. Crome



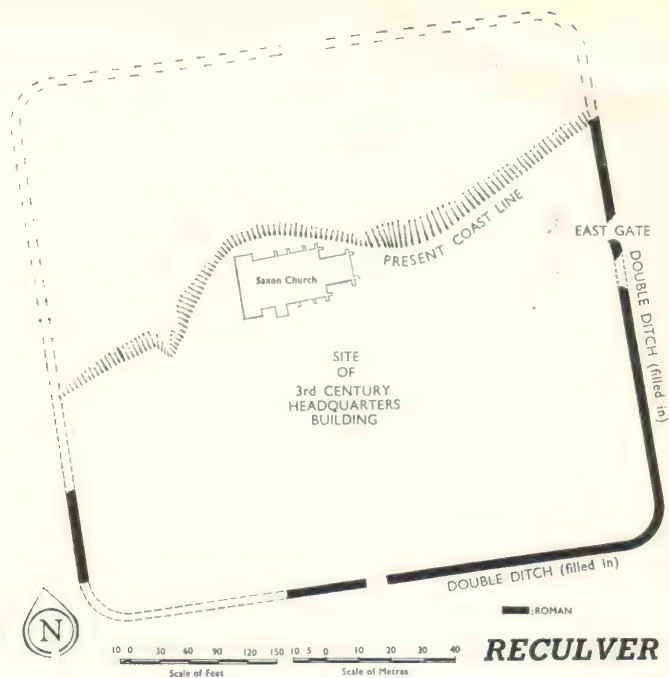
4. *Burgh and Reculver*

These forts are under the care of the Department of the Environment. A printed guide to each is available at the site.

The plan of **Burgh** Castle appears to have been a quadrilateral with its longer sides parallel; but the western wall fronting the Waveney has disappeared. The angles are rounded, and at these angles, and evenly spaced between them, are six projecting bastions, solid and pear-shaped. These bastions were evidently added only after construction had begun, which suggests that this was one of the older 'Saxon Shore' forts; for at Richborough, Pevensey, and Portchester the bastions are an integral part of the structure. At the south-west corner of the fort an earthen mound, finally destroyed in 1839, was almost certainly the motte of a typical Norman castle erected soon after the Conquest. The field east of the fort was used as a burial ground long after the place was abandoned.



History at Burgh is shadowy. When in AD 630 Sigbert, King of the East Angles, introduced Christianity into his kingdom, he gave to St Fursa, an Irish ascetic, land inside a Roman fortress whereon to found a monastery. Probably this fortress was Burgh Castle; certainly churches were established by Saxon Christians in three others in the series of forts – Bradwell, Reculver, and Richborough.



RECVLVER CHURCH, N.E.

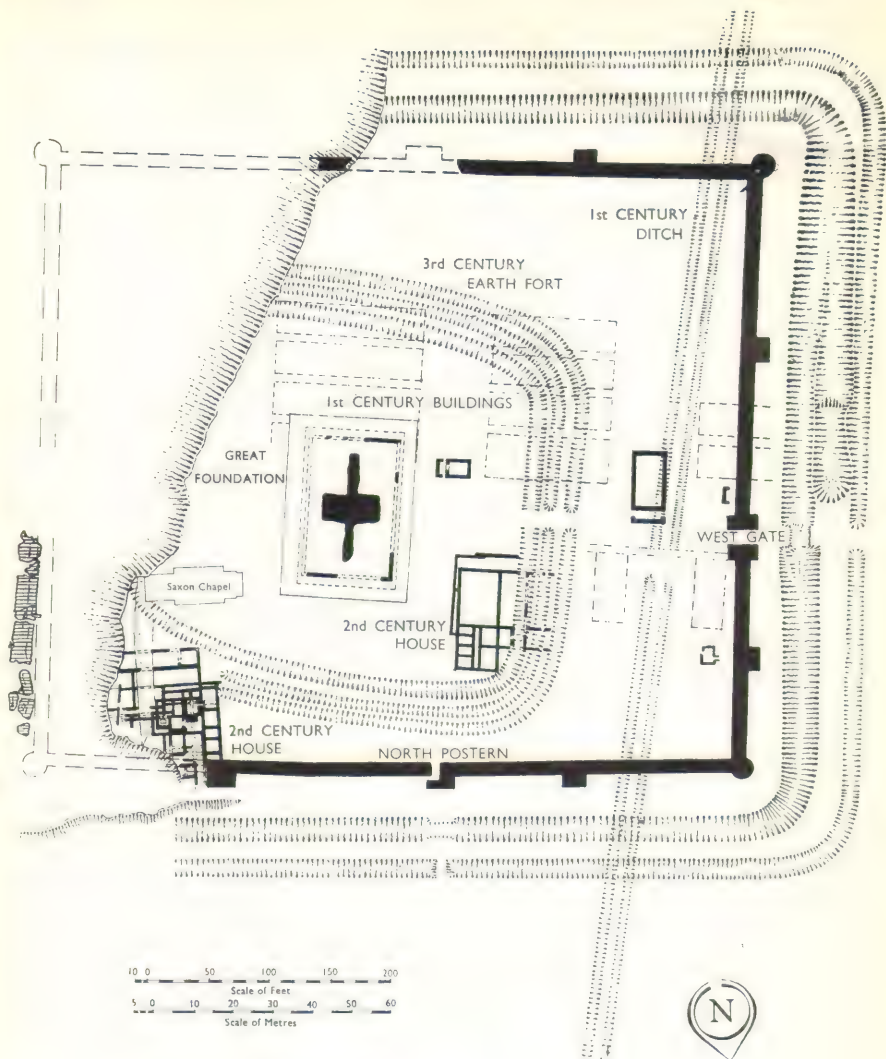
Cont. Map, Sep. 1809. Pl. I. p. 801.





At **Reculver**, on the edge of the encroaching sea, are the ruins of a church founded about AD 669 by Egbert, King of Kent, within the walls of the third-century fort erected against the pirate raids of Egbert's ancestors. It consisted of an aisleless nave about 37 feet long and a chancel ending in an apse, polygonal without and round within. This church was enlarged in the twelfth century and given the twin towers known as the Two Sisters – or, to seamen, as the Reculvers. So long had these towers been valued as a landmark for navigation that they were taken over for preservation by Trinity House in 1809 when the rest of the church was demolished.

In the Middle Ages a great stone cross stood in front of the arcade dividing the nave from the chancel. John Leland said it was nine feet high and one of the fairest and most ancient crosses he had ever seen. Bold figures of Christ and the Apostles, with inscriptions, were carved round the stone column supporting the cross.



RICHBOROUGH

(Opposite) Aerial view
of Richborough Castle

5. *Richborough, Pevensey and Portchester*

These three forts, now under the care of the Department of the Environment, are undoubtedly the finest, as regards both preservation and historical interest. The Department publishes detailed descriptive pamphlets on each fort, and these are available on the sites. Here we shall consider only the outstanding features and the principal historical events connected with each fortress.



(a) **Richborough** (*Rutupiae*)

Richborough can claim to be, with Hadrian's Wall, the most important Roman monument in Britain. For it was here, with little doubt, that the four invading Legions under Aulus Plautius assembled after landing in Britain during the Claudian invasion of AD 43. 'It is probable', wrote the late J. P. Bushe-Fox (formerly Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments), 'that the whole force landed here, because defensive ditches of the period

have been found enclosing a large area'.¹ Some forty years later a towering marble monument was erected within the fort to commemorate the completion of the conquest; its foundations can still be seen today. Now the lonely, forsaken walls, grimly outlined against the wide-spreading Kentish sky, have a melancholy splendour. They stand isolated on a hillock overlooking flat fields; and one whole side of the fort has collapsed.



Part of the third-century walls

But in Roman times that hillock was an island in the channel of the river Wantsum, which then separated Kent from Thanet and the Stonor Bank. The Channel tides have left it, as have the tides of history.

At first, no doubt, there would be only wooden buildings and earth embankments. Later, in about AD 85, the site was cleared to make way for the erection of the magnificent marble memorial to the invasion. It was ornamented with bronze statues, probably in honour of the Emperor

¹ 'Richborough Castle, Kent': Official Pamphlet.

Domitian and his great general Agricola, who completed the conquest of Britain. Agricola governed the island for eight years, and carried the eagles far into Scotland.

Rutupiae continued to be occupied throughout the second century, though most of the buildings of that period have perished; there are, however, remains of two stone houses and evidence of a cemetery. During the second half of the third century the Romans built an earth fort with a triple line of ditches, fragmentary remains of which can be seen; there are also remains of a tomb, though part of this was cut away in the latter part of the third century when the present typical 'Saxon Shore' fort was erected.

The walls, both in construction and in plan, resemble those at Reculver and other strongholds of the period. According to Bushe-Fox, there is little doubt that these improvements were made by Carausius, who filled in most of the earlier second-century fort to provide foundations for the new one.

Thousands of small bronze coins of the fourth century have been found on the site, testifying to the intensity of its occupation down to the end of the Roman period.

To anyone with a sense of the past, entering *Rutupiae* for the first time excites the imagination. For this was the Gateway to Britain long before Dover got that name. Although they have been filled in, you can see, fifty feet east of the West Gate, the line of ditches and banks thrown up in AD 43 by the Legionaries, who, in some forty years, were to conquer most of the island and colonize it for some four centuries. Here began the Roman Occupation, which lasted for almost as long a time as separates us from the period of Henry VIII.

Among the Legions stationed here for a time was the famous Second Augusta with which Vespasian conquered the West Country, and which for centuries was based on Caerleon in Monmouthshire.

Unlike some other 'Saxon Shore' forts, *Rutupiae* had good road communications; in fact the Watling Street itself leaves by its West Gate and leads straight to Canterbury and so north-westward to Chester. And Canterbury reminds one of St Augustine, to whom a chapel was dedicated at *Rutupiae* in Saxon times. There is a medieval legend which relates

that the Saint landed at Richborough (as well he might have done) whilst on his way to meet the King of Kent, Ethelbert, in 597. In medieval times pilgrims were shown a stone bearing the imprint of St Augustine's foot, and the chapel was built to preserve this relic. You can still see its foundations in the east part of the site.

Not far from this chapel stands the massive base of the great marble monument erected to commemorate the Roman invasion, and there are numerous fragments on exhibition in the museum. 'The platform', writes Bushe-Fox, 'was constructed somewhere about AD 85 to support a heavy monument, faced with marble, with marble pillars and bronze statues, which towered above the sea, giving ships passing up the Wantsum a thrilling reminder of the might of Rome'.

Later, in the third century, the marble facing was ripped off and the monument converted into a mere look-out post; now even that has disappeared, and only the foundations remain.

It is important, when visiting *Rutupiae*, to remember that it represents a palimpsest of the centuries; that its most prominent surviving remains, the walls built by Carausius, in the third century, represent only one phase of its long history. For instance, there are foundations of the wooden buildings – since disappeared – which housed the garrison; other vanished buildings were granaries and storehouses. There was also a wine-cellar, still visible today a little to the north of the West Gate. A flight of steps led to two rooms, in one of which were holes in the ground to hold the great wine-jars (*amphorae*) fragrant with the vintages of France, Italy and even Greece. 'Samian Wine' from the island of Samos was famous throughout the Roman world.

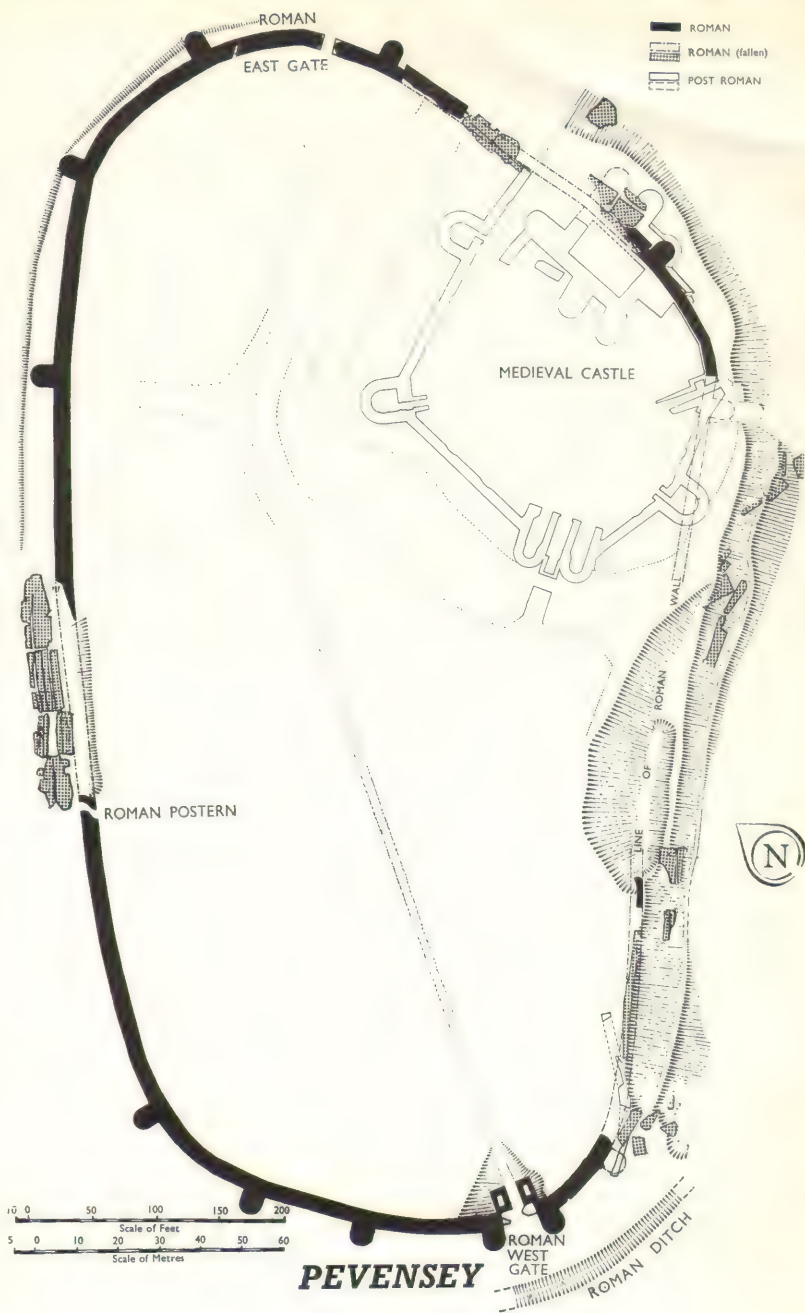
For a detailed description of the architectural and archaeological remains, visitors should consult the pamphlet issued by the Department. Here one can point only to a few details which should not be missed. First, the faint remains of the embankments thrown up by the soldiers of Aulus Plautius long before the fort was built. Second, the chapel of St Augustine. Third, the foundations of the fourth-century pagan temple. Fourth, the Great Foundation, *i.e.* of the monument commemorating the Roman conquest. Fifth, remains of the grave of a Roman officer, with the skeleton still in it (the bronze pin which held his shroud in place is now



Bronzes in Richborough Museum: (left) head of Harpocrates; (right) steelyard weight in the form of a Satyr

in the museum on the site). Sixth, the third-century walls of the 'Saxon Shore' fort which cannot be missed. Seventh and last, the museum itself, full of fascinating remains, many of them retrieved from the 300 wells, rubbish pits, etc., which archaeologists have found at Richborough.

Here you can see Roman military equipment such as swords, daggers, spear-heads, horse-accoutrements; a 'pig' of lead inscribed with the name of the Emperor Nerva (AD 96-98); the bust of an Empress, probably the wicked Faustina, daughter of Antoninus Pius who built the Antonine Wall in Scotland; games such as dice; toilet articles such as a plated bronze mirror, combs, glass phials for cosmetics, and manicure sets which differed from their modern counterparts in at least one respect. They included not only tweezers and nail-cleaners, but ear-scoops.





Pevensey (*Anderida*)

Earlier, in referring to the Gallic *Litus Saxonicum*, we pointed out that a considerable proportion of the Gallic forts protected towns of importance in themselves, whereas in Britain the 'Saxon Shore' forts were usually far from any large centre of population, though commanding strategic routes. This is especially true of Pevensey (*Anderida*) in Sussex. As the official guide-book comments: 'Until the Roman fort was built (towards the close of the third century) the site was uninhabited. . . .

'Excavation has also shown that the area examined within the walls contained only wooden huts or shanties, some with tiled hearths; this seems to be characteristic and contrasts with the regular arrangements within earlier Roman camps. The majority of coins found belong to the late third century and to the fourth'.¹

¹ *Pevensey Castle: Official Guidebook.*



General view from the west

But at Pevensey, as at Portchester, two different worlds are juxtaposed: Roman and Norman. This gives to both forts an added fascination. Six centuries after the Romans had left, long after the forts had been stripped and left derelict, the great walls were still strong enough to invite the Norman Kings to build castles within them. Thus the Roman walls enclosed the 'outer bailey' of the castle within which rose the Norman Keep.

In fact the Roman *enceinte*, with its rubble walls clenched by iron-hard cement, was more enduring even than the finest Norman masonry; Roman cement was of such adamantine toughness that when, at Richborough, engineers attempted to drill into the foundations of the invasion monument, the drills snapped; it was easier to break the stones than the cement which knitted them together.

Entering Pevensey the visitor who has seen other 'Saxon Shore' forts will first notice its comparative irregularity of shape. It is not rectangular, as are all the others, but an irregular oval made to fit the configuration of the ground. The projecting bastions, especially those flanking the West



Moat and towers, with church in the background

Gate, are tremendous drums of stone laced with horizontal bonding-courses of red brick in characteristic Roman fashion. Although the medieval masons repaired and refaced these towers, their essentially Roman character is obvious.

The walls are twelve feet thick and enclose about ten acres, considerably larger than most 'Saxon Shore' forts, and the solid round-fronted bastions are irregularly spaced, but in such a way as to ensure that the wall between each pair can be covered by cross-fire. Opposite the West Gate is another which led to the harbour where the warships were moored, but now there are only marshland and meadows. There is not a better place than Pevensey to study Roman masonry. Excavations have shown that the foundations incorporated timber baulks, which have of course decayed, but the 'chases' or grooves which encased them can still be seen in places. One section of the inner face of the north-west wall has been left exposed down to the Roman level. An intriguing feature of this 1700-year-old fortress is a pair of cunningly-concealed machine-gun posts built in 1940 in the ruins of a Roman wall in preparation for a German invasion. And crowning

the north-west bastion is another 'pill-box' of 1940, disguised to look like part of the Roman fort.

To purists these may seem anachronisms; to others they are reminders of the original function of this building, which has guarded one of the gateways of Britain for nearly 2000 years. First Carausius raised it on a virgin site, whether against the Saxons or Maximian no one certainly knows. Then the Norman Kings, recognizing Pevensey's strategic value, improved on it, added to its defences, and built the great Keep on the south-eastern side. They also built the chapel within the inner bailey which is itself Norman.

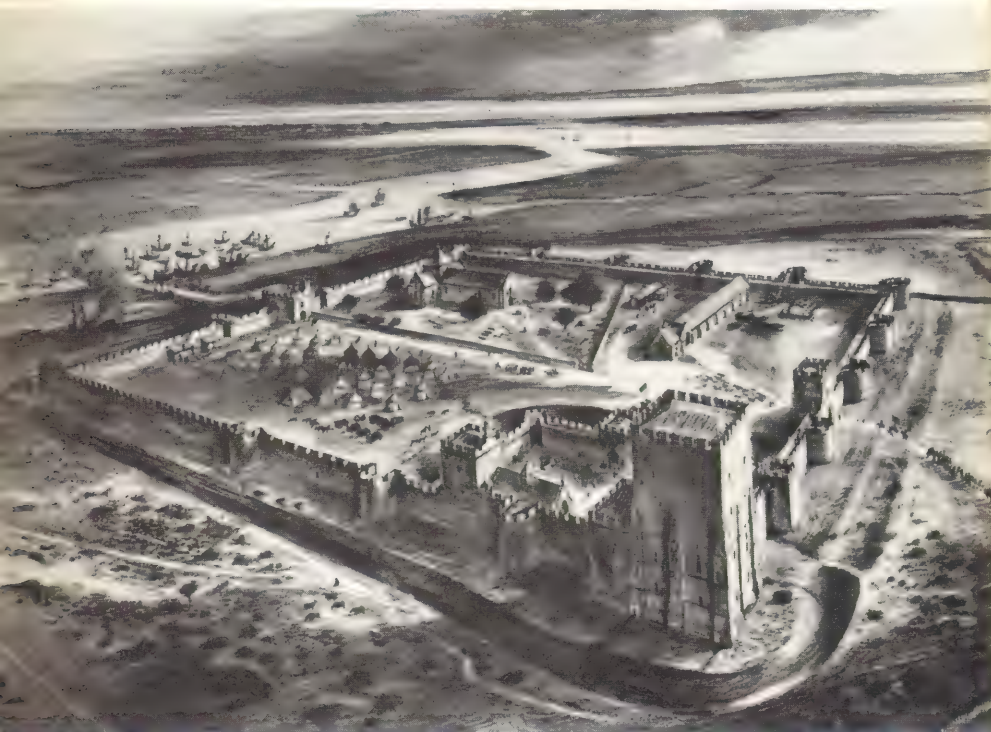
Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, held Pevensey against King Rufus in 1088. Gilbert, Earl of Pembroke, occupied it in the time of King Stephen, who besieged it in 1147. Simon de Montfort the Younger laid siege to it in 1264-65, but unavailingly. It passed in time to Margaret, second wife of Edward I; to Philippa, Edward III's Queen; to John of Gaunt, 'time-honoured Lancaster'; and soon afterwards it endured yet another siege by King Richard II when Henry Bolingbroke was warring for the Crown. One wonders if Shakespeare, who described so vividly the Dover cliffs, ever visited Pevensey when he was writing his historical plays.

With the invention of gunpowder and the doom of walled fortresses Pevensey ceased to be of much military importance. Gradually the sea receded, and the fort was deserted and left to rot. In 1587, when the Spanish Armada threatened, it was surveyed as a possible defensive site, but the surveyors recommended that it be either 're-edified or utterly rased'. They also remarked contemptuously on 'two demi-culverins' (cannon) 'of small value'. One of these can still be seen in the outer bailey near the entrance to the inner bailey. It is of Sussex iron, smelted in the Weald, and bears a crowned Tudor Rose with the initials E.R. (Elisabetha Regina).

Now Pevensey is an Ancient Monument, with instructive notices and neatly-clipped turf lovingly tended by the Department. But those machine-gun posts are a reminder that even as recently as 1940 those grim old bastions, built by Roman engineers, could still have helped to defend this island, seventeen hundred years after their builders had been laid beneath the Sussex soil.

Portchester

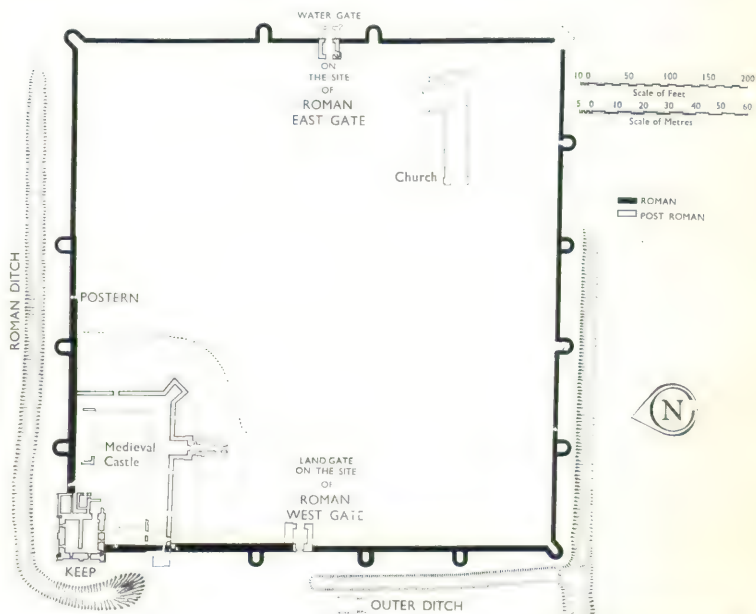
The last and perhaps the finest of the 'Saxon Shore' forts is in Hampshire. Portchester, probably the *Portus Adurni* mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, overlooks Portsmouth Harbour. As you cross the green turf and enter the West or Sea Gate you see the cranes of the naval dockyards on the far side; the sea-channel comes right up to the walls of the fort as it did in Roman times. Sailing dinghies with brightly-painted hulls lie at anchor where the Roman ships once moored. Modern warships, looming hugely across the grey water, recall the *Classis Britannica* of which Carausius was a senior officer (if he did not actually command it). Here again, as at Pevensey, past and present mingle.



Reconstruction by Alan Sorrell of Portchester Castle as it might have appeared c. 1400



(Opposite) Of 20 bastions at Portchester, 14 have endured



PORTCHESTER



At first sight Portchester appears to be medieval. There is a quadrilateral enclosure with projecting towers, a Land Gate on the west and a Water Gate on the east; to the north of the walls, which are of flint bonded with brick, is a Roman defensive ditch, and in the north-west corner rises the mighty Norman Keep which overlooks other medieval buildings dating from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. There is also, in the south-east corner of the *enceinte*, a large church, part of an Augustinian priory built by Henry I in 1133.

But the fort remains basically Roman, even where the walls and towers have been refaced by medieval masonry. The rectilinear plan is Roman; the symmetry of the building, with its equidistantly-spaced bastions (which are hollow, not solid as at Pevensey), is Roman. The Norman

Kings only exploited the defensive possibilities of a site already discovered by their predecessors some six centuries earlier. The big drum-towers echo those at Pevensey, Richborough and Brancaster. The hand of Carausius, or whoever built this magnificent chain of forts, is everywhere apparent. But, unlike Brancaster and Richborough, Portchester is so well preserved that it is still possible to tread the wall-walk which Roman sentries paced in the days of Diocletian and Maximian.

Then, early in the fifth century, the Romans left, and during the Dark Ages Portchester was probably deserted. Later came the Norman conquerors who, some time in the twelfth century, adapted the abandoned fortress as a castle. Normally Portchester was commanded by a Constable appointed by the King, but the monarchs themselves were frequently



*The keep
was begun by
Henry II
800 years ago.
Its height was
increased in two
stages early in
the thirteenth
century*

*(Opposite)
Henry V, who
in 1415 set out
for France
from Portchester*



there, particularly during the years when the Plantagenet Kings strove to retain or reconquer their French dominions. Henry II, John, and Henry III often visited Portchester. In the reign of John it was surrendered to Prince Louis of France who ordered it to be burned; but for some reason the order was not put into effect. Edward II revived the garrison when foreign invasion was threatened; and in 1415 it was at Portchester that Henry V assembled his forces before sailing for France and the battle of Agincourt.

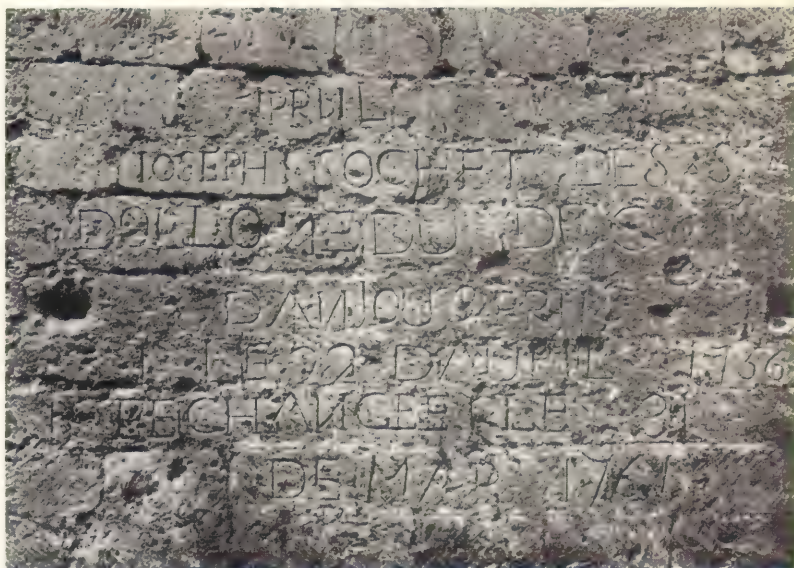
Whether Shakespeare was aware of it or not, the scene of Henry's departure in *King Henry V* is Portchester, though Act II, Scene 2, is headed 'Southampton. A Council Chamber'. It was probably here that the young King exclaimed to his nobles:

'Now sits the wind fair, and we will aboard'

and it may have been here that the traitors Cambridge, Grey and Scroop were discovered, apprehended, and summarily beheaded:

*'Get you, therefore, hence,
Poor miserable wretches, to your death;
The taste whereof God of his mercy give you
Patience to endure, and true repentance
Of all your dear offences! Bear them hence.
Now, Lords, for France; the enterprise whereof
Shall be to you, as us, like glorious'*

Since that time, although Portchester was visited by many British Kings and Queens, it ceased to be of military importance, though during the Civil War troops were quartered there. For a time it was a prison. Dutch prisoners were incarcerated at Portchester in 1665 and Frenchmen during the Seven Years War (their carved signatures and inscriptions can be seen in a number of places). It did not, as did Pevensey, regain some of its former importance in 1940, when, after the fall of France, that Roman fort was re-fortified and used as an observation and command post.



French prisoners in the Seven Years War have left records of their captivity

The last significant date in Portchester's history was 1926, when it was taken over by the Office of Works (now the Department of the Environment) and became, officially, an Ancient Monument.

Nevertheless it remains, despite its medieval additions and modern encroachments, perhaps the best-preserved and most strikingly evocative example of a 'Saxon Shore' fort.

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